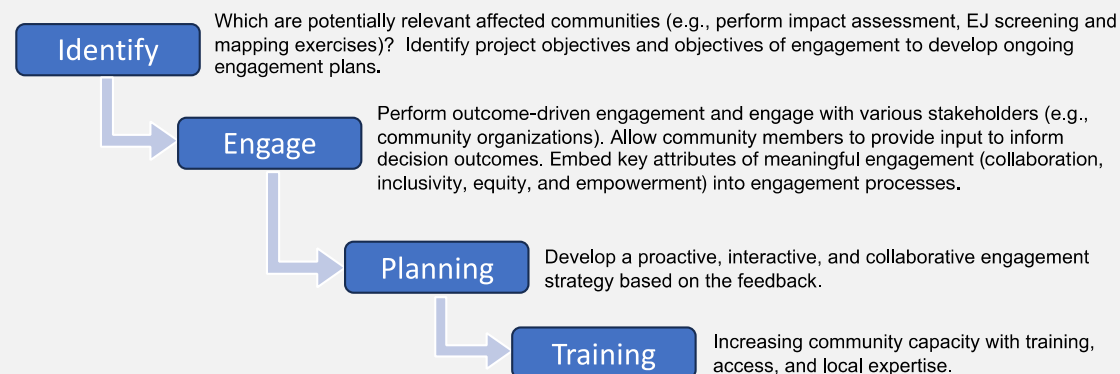


Best Practices for Engaging with Environmental Justice Communities

Effective engagement requires collaboratively working with environmental justice communities to address issues that are affecting the health and well-being of the people that live in a given community. Meaningful engagement requires resources and dedication to ensure that all community members are heard, informed, involved, and empowered.

Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful involvement should happen throughout the project period from planning, development, and operations. This is a reiterative process and should not be a check-the-box activity.



Why is Meaningful Engagement Important?

1. Rebuilding trust

Stories of EJ communities show the long-standing history of decisions being made about those communities without much consultation or engagement. This history can trigger negative reactions in EJ communities and lead to ineffective interaction and outcome of a new well-intended project.

2. Recognizing and utilizing invaluable community input

Those who live in the community may have information, such as previous siting issues or culturally sensitive topics, that outsiders have no way of knowing. Understanding and applying community input does not only contribute to effectively addressing community concerns and thus increase the likelihood of a project's success, but also promotes a sense of community autonomy and ownership.

3. Opportunity to provide information

There are certainly valid concerns raised by communities impacted by a project's construction or operation, but there can also be resistance that is based on lack of or inaccurate information. Meaningfully engaging with communities provides opportunities to inform, educate, and answer any questions that community members may have.

Participatory Planning

The essence of participatory planning is “valuing local people and communities as beneficiaries, contributors, users, and stakeholders.”¹ It is critical that during participatory planning, everyone's thoughts and opinions, not just those of professionals and experts, are respected and considered, although it is expected that various stakeholders will and should challenge others' assumptions and discuss what the best strategy might be.²

Different spectrums of participatory planning include: 1) information, 2) consultation, 3) deciding together, 4) acting together, and 5) supporting independent community initiatives. Which level is appropriate should be determined together based on different circumstances.²

Advantages²

- Bringing a broader range of people to the planning process provides access to a broader range of perspectives and ideas.
- It involves all affected populations and their perspectives from the outset.
- Progressing equity through two-way and collaborative decision-making.
- Logically, a participatory planning approach should be effective.

Challenges²

- This process takes longer.
- Education of the community members and other stakeholders may be required.
- A small number of determined individuals may interrupt the whole process.

Key Considerations³

- Identify who is underrepresented.
- Address language barriers.
- Be thoughtful about the meeting location and time to make it easy for people to be able to participate.
- Be upfront about non-negotiables to manage expectations.
- Provide as much information as possible.
- Get creative with what these engagement events look like.

- 1 Participatory Research for Environmental Justice: A Critical Interpretive Synthesis <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/EHP6274>
- 2 Analyzing Community Problems and Designing and Adapting Community Interventions <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/where-to-start/participatory-approaches/main>
- 3 Best Practices for Meaningful Community Engagement, https://groundworkusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GWUSA_Best-Practices-for-Meaningful-Community-Engagement-Tip-Sheet.pdf